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mix today. High 35.
Low 20.
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Legislative preview forum is today

KENDALLVILLE — A public forum previewing the coming legislative session of the Indiana General Assembly will be held from 10 a.m. to noon today at the St. John Lutheran Church Worship Center, 301 S. Oak St.

Invited legislators include state Rep. David Yarde, R-Garrett, state Rep. Kathy Heuer, R-Columbia City and state Sen. Susan Glick, R-LaGrange.

The forum is being sponsored by the Kendallville Public Library Legislative Committee.

Tax preparers needed for NCCOA

KENDALLVILLE — The Noble County Council on Aging is seeking volunteers to help prepare tax returns.

The Council on Aging offers the free service to citizens from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Wednesdays beginning in February.

Anyone interested in offering their assistance can contact the council's assistant director, Joyce

Prison forms gospel choir

BY BOB BRALEY

bobb@kpcnews.net

ALBION — Most people wouldn't associate a touring choir with prison inmates — but that's exactly what the Chain O' Lakes Correctional Facility in rural Albion is offering.

The Chain O' Lakes Men's Gospel Choir is touring to area churches, sharing gospel music and personal testimonies from about 10 prisoners, said Michael Cunegin, the superintendent at Chain O' Lakes Correctional Facility.

It all stemmed from a challenge from Indiana Department of Correction commissioner Edwin G. Buss, Cunegin said. The challenge? "Think outside the box," the superintendent said.

The thought occurred to Cunegin to start a gospel music choir.

"Everybody loves music," Cunegin said. And gospel was a logical choice. "It's an upbeat kind of music," he said.

Plus, he said, people listening to the song as they sing it can find themselves thinking about what it means in their lives.

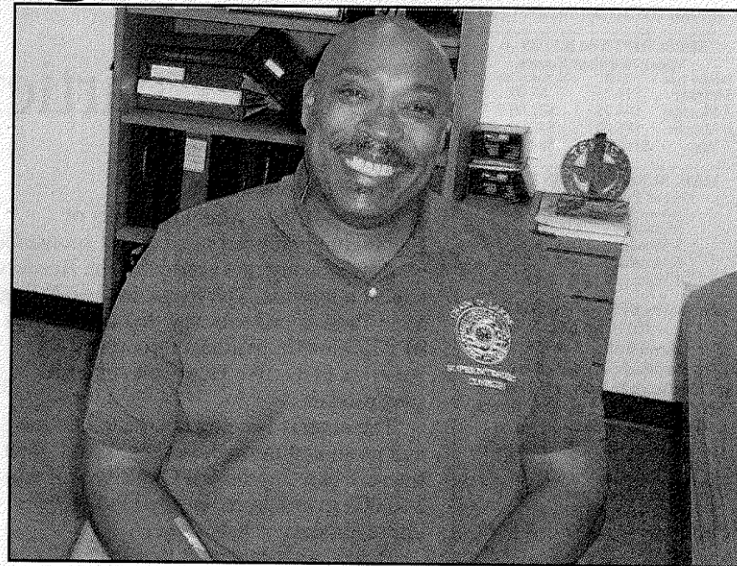
The concept was to do something to help build the prisoners up, getting them beyond the problems that got them in trouble and growing self-esteem, Cunegin said. "I'm working on the healing of them while they're in here. ... It's a healing process."

Chain O' Lakes is a minimum security facility that houses no pedophiles, Cunegin said.

When Cunegin first posted the information to form the choir, only three of the 154 men incarcerated there signed up. Soon, it was up to about 10, where the membership is now.

The music requires the men to do something many of them haven't learned before — trust, Cunegin said. "It's all a capella, so they have to trust each other on the sound."

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BOB BRALEY

Chain O' Lakes Correctional Facility superintendent Michael Cunegin started a touring choir for prisoners at the minimum security facility which he says has provided unexpected benefits for both the inmates and the community.

Goodbye, Kovu



Clinton backs toy deal

WASHINGTON (AP) — In the spirit of the holiday season, President Barack Obama's tax-cut deal with Republicans is becoming a Christmas tree tinsel with gifts for lobbyists and lawmakers. But that hardly stopped the squabbling on Friday, with Bill Clinton even back at the White House pleading the president's case.

While Republicans sat back quietly, mostly pleased, Democrats and other liberals were going at each other ever so publicly. As Clinton lectured on Obama's behalf, Vermont independent Bernie Sanders castigated the agreement for the TV cameras in the mostly empty Senate chamber.

The tax deal, reached behind the scenes and still informal, now includes ethanol subsidies for rural folks, commuter tax breaks for their cousins in the cities and suburbs and wind and solar grants for the environmentalists — all aimed at winning votes, particularly from reluctant Democrats.

The holiday additions are

being hung on the big tree that was Congress' main reason for spending December in Washington, long after the elections that will give Republicans new power in January. The measure will extend Bush-era tax cuts, averting big tax increases for nearly all Americans, and keep jobless benefits flowing.

Republicans generally liked that agreement, worked out by Obama and GOP leaders. Democrats generally didn't, hence the add-ons.

It's all expected to come to a decisive vote next week, total cost by the latest congressional estimate: \$857.8 billion.

On Friday, there were contrasting events for public consumption.

On Capitol Hill, Sanders spoke vigorously for hours in a virtually empty chamber, urging defeat of a measure he said would give "tax breaks to millionaires and billionaires who don't need it."

At the White House, Obama turned over the

former President Clinton who declared, "I don't believe there is a better deal out there." All sides, he said, "are going to have to eat some things they don't like."

The add-ons were being attached behind the scenes.

Almost \$5 billion in subsidies for corn-based ethanol and a continuing tariff to protect against ethanol imports were wrapped up and placed on the tree Thursday night for farm-state lawmakers and agribusiness lobbyists. Environmentalists won more grants for developers of renewable energy, like wind and solar.

For urban lawmakers, there's a continuation of about-to-expire tax breaks that could save commuters who use mass transit about \$1,000 a year. Other popular tax provisions aimed at increasing production of hybrid automobiles, biodiesel fuel, coal and energy-efficient household appliances would be extended through the end of 2011 under the new add-ons.

sentence.

In the speech, Liu portrays the surprisingly exactly when the

CHOIR: Singers are performing at area churches

FROM PAGE A1

But a group that Cunegin formed to help the men learn skills for life beyond the walls has also become something more. "Little did I know it would start snowballing," he said.

"We've now been to about five different churches," Cunegin said. "It's how it's touched people's hearts, and they want to come in and assist even more."

People have come up to thank the men for singing, and some at Trinity stayed for the second service to hear the choir again.

The men have also gotten excited about putting the music together, Cunegin said. They have created their own arrangement of the Christmas carol "Joy To the World," which they were eager to share with him.

The group were scheduled to perform at the

Sweet & Simple Christmas at the Sweet Church Community Center in rural Albion Friday. They're scheduled to sing at First Church of God in Kendallville and Lakeside Chapel in Wawasee on Sunday, Dec. 19.

The project is part of the efforts at giving inmates at Chain O' Lakes skills to cope outside, Cunegin said. Another option for some inmates is the faith-based mentoring ministries that some at the facility participate in at Stillwater Retreat, a center in Allen County.

Cunegin looks for those who seem likely to qualify for the program as he sees the men day in and day out. Stillwater's staff has had the training to work with the prisoners, and they work to build trust with them — a trust that continues once the men are outside the walls.

By learning about partnership, friendship and trust while inside the DOC, the men have a better chance of becoming more productive citizens, fathers and husbands when they're outside the facility, Cunegin said. "They build teamwork. They build trust."

Going to Stillwater is a strange experience for those men who've only lived in the city, Cunegin said. "We take being out in the woods for granted," he said. "For them, it's like walking into a jungle."

The key is to give the men the opportunity while in prison to use the time to better themselves, Cunegin said. It's their choice.

But it's important to do more with the time than just lock the men away, because they will be back out again, Cunegin said. "You can't throw them away."

CLINTON: Former president says tax bill compromise is 'good deal'

FROM PAGE A1

tive energy. It's unclear whether House Democrats, who are most opposed, will be able to demand changes that go much further.

Clinton gave the package his full-throated endorsement, even while noting that he opposes the extension of upper-income tax cuts —

and keep us going," he said.

"In my opinion, this is a good bill and I hope that my fellow Democrats will support it," Clinton said. "I think this is a much, much better agreement than would be reached were we to wait until January."

Republicans, newly emboldened after an election that next year will put the

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